***The Circuit* Higher Level Thinking Discussion Questions**

**\*Many answers will vary based on students’ responses/opinions.**

**Chapter 1: “Under the Wire” (pages 1-7)**

1. **What does California represent to Francisco and his family? How do you know? (Give an example to support.)**

A better life (“Papá’s eyes sparkled”), money (Fito says they “sweep money off the streets”)

1. **What can you infer about the family’s economic state, based on their belongings, living conditions, etc?**

They are very poor (they pack everything in a suitcase, buy second-class train tickets, walk to locations, crawl under the wire fence, sleep outside, etc.)

1. **Imagine you are Francisco. How would you feel crawling through the hole beneath the wire fence?**

Scared, excited, humiliated, etc.

**Chapter 2: “Soledad” (pages 8-11)**

1. **Discuss what you think the author is trying to convey about the migrant family.**

They are hard-working, they all pull their weight, they take pride in their work, etc.

1. **Identify Papá’s response after Francisco mixes dirt with the cotton bolls. Interpret what this tells you about his father’s values/the values of the migrant family.**

He is disappointed/angry. Papá doesn’t believe in cheating/being dishonest in order to get more money.

1. **Compare your life with Francisco’s. What’s the same? What’s different? (Write at least a paragraph.)**

Francisco’s life – hard, constantly moving, little time in school, daydreams since he doesn’t understand teacher, lonely, outcast, few clothes

Student’s life – (depends whether migrant or not, student’s personality, etc.) easier/harder, stationary/moving, more time in school, may or may not understand English, lonely, more technology

**Chapter 3: “Inside Out” (pages 12-21)**

1. **Evaluate the following scenarios:**

**How would Francisco’s experience at school change…**

**…if he had been able to speak freely in Spanish?**

Not felt awkward/like an outcast, learned more easily, learned more

**…if he had been able to talk to Arthur more?**

Felt like someone understood

**…if he had a teacher who spoke Spanish (at least a few words here and there)?**

Felt like someone cared

1. **What does Francisco’s giving his drawing away to Curtis say about Francisco (i.e. examine his character)?**

He is selfless, wants to be friends, not too materialistic.

**Chapter 4: “Miracle in Tent City” (pages 22-35)**

1. **“One person’s trash is another’s person’s treasure” is a saying we use all the time in English. List some “trash” (at least 3 items) that the family takes and describe how they turn it into something useful.**

Discarded lumber/linoleum – floor for tent; wooden box – baby crib; old green army blanket – lining for crib; stuffing from mattress/white flour sack – pillow for baby

1. **Francisco says he had to repeat first grade because he did not know English.**

**Defend why you think this is fair or why you think this is unfair.**

Fair – he didn’t know the information or English

Unfair – maybe he did know the information, just in his own language

**Do you think he would have passed if he had been taught in Spanish? Why or why not? Select some reasons to support your opinion.**

Yes – communicating in your language is always easier

No – he missed too much school

**What do you think could have been done to help him pass?**

Someone to advocate for him, some instruction in Spanish, more encouragement (from teacher, peers, parents), more time in school, going to a different school when he moved

**Various schools of thought exist regarding the education of English Language Learners. Some educators believe schools today should teach in English only. Others believe in bilingual classrooms, where students are taught in both English and Spanish until they learn the language. Still others believe they should separate Spanish speakers from English because they need more help. What is your view of the topic? Choose one of the three or create your own, just make sure you defend your position adequately and appropriately.**

English only – since it’s what we speak here in the US

Bilingual – then students are integrated and learn in English and Spanish (good for English speakers to learn Spanish too)

Spanish separate class – more one-on-one attention to help them succeed

1. **Torito becomes sick and almost dies. At one point, Mamá says that the family doesn’t have the money to pay for a hospital visit. In our country (and world) today, there is a great deal of talk about “universal healthcare.” This means that every citizen – and there is even talk about everyone, citizen or non-citizen – would receive healthcare, regardless of their job situation or their decision to obtain healthcare. Basically, it’s a “womb to tomb” mentality. The government takes care of people from birth to death if/when they get sick.**

**Should every citizen receive medical care from the government, should it be an individual’s decision to pay for healthcare and what type, or should the government essentially force individuals to pay into the universal healthcare system? Why?**

Every citizen – then everyone is taken care of

Individual’s decision to pay – land of the free = right to choose what you want

Government forces individuals to pay – everyone needs it anyway

**And what about non-citizens: should they receive medical care if they are sick and living here? What if they are undocumented?**

Yes – they’re people too and we need to take care of everyone

Kind of – citizens should come first (but if they have a visa we should help them)

No – undocumented didn’t go through the proper channels to get here and they are taking a citizen’s job

**Chapter 5: “El Angel de Oro” (pages 36-41)**

1. **Imagine you are Francisco and you realize your friend Miguelito has just moved. Write at least a paragraph describing your feelings.**

Sad, disappointed, angry, frustrated, lonely, like I’ll never see him again, hope I’ll see him again, remember the good times

1. **A symbol is something (often an object or character) that means/represents something more. For example, a cross could symbolize Christianity, a dog could symbolize loyalty, the American flag could symbolize freedom/the U.S., etc. What do you think are symbols in this chapter? Pick one and write what you believe it means and why.**

Francisco’s rescuing the fish – attempt to rescue his friendship with Miguelito, who just moved

Goldfish and gray fish in the bowl – reminds him of his friendship with Miguelito

Miguelito’s empty cabin (#20) – change/moving/migrant way of life

Rain/puddles/suffocating fish – migrant life/feeling trapped in migrant way of life/no way of escape

**Chapter 6: “Christmas Gift” (pages 42-46)**

1. **Think of Papá’s actions in this chapter. Choose 1 word to describe him and develop a paragraph to justify your answer. Use examples, details, etc. (from this chapter and/or others) to support your point.**

Compassionate, sympathetic, sweet, kind, kind/tender-hearted, loving, helpful, remarkable, etc. – he gave of what little he had to help someone less fortunate than himself (i.e. the man and his pregnant wife who were fellow countrymen), he gave Mamá a gift to show his love even though it wasn’t much

1. **Create a list of ideas to help a family/families in need. Think of what resources you need. How could you help your plan come to fruition? In other words, how can you “make it happen”?**

Put together baskets based on different categories, such as food, clothing, toiletries, school supplies, toys, etc. Designate each class a category and make them responsible for bringing in items.

Host a fundraiser (candy bars, citrus fruit, etc.) and give the money to the families or to an organization dedicated to helping those dealing with poverty.

Donate your time to helping at a soup kitchen, a shelter, etc. or set aside a work day to help clean up a neighborhood plagued by poverty.

1. **Do you think people who live in poverty are less successful than people who live in abundance (or even wealth)? Why or why not? Write at least a paragraph.**

Yes – they don’t have all of the opportunities that wealthier people have, they may not have an adequate education, they don’t have as much money to become successful, they are stuck in the same cycle as their parents and the rest of their family

No – they will work harder to get what they want, they have more drive, they are out to change their environment/their lives in order to better themselves, they have “street smarts” instead of “book smarts,” they weren’t handed anything on a silver platter

**Chapter 7: “Death Forgiven” (pages 47-50)**

1. **Has your attitude of Papá in this chapter changed from the last chapter? How would you describe him now? Write a paragraph.**

No – see #1 in Chapter 6; he’s still the same man, he was just having a bad day and lost his temper, but he’s really just worried about providing for his family

Yes – he just took a broom and killed his child’s pet (what kind of father would do that?), he is mean, impatient, and inconsiderate

1. **Authors are deliberate in choosing certain stories to include in their works. Why would Francisco Jiménez even include this chapter about a pet parrot? What’s the point of it? Write a paragraph describing your view.**

Most likely every child (migrant or non-migrant) can relate to having a pet – maybe he’s showing the common ground between two cultures/people groups.

He calls El Perico “undocumented,” the same word used for the family’s friends (the couple) and the same as some of the people in Francisco’s family (including himself).

**Chapter 8: “Cotton Sack” (pages 51-60)**

1. **Are Francisco and Roberto too young to work in the fields? Why or why not? Give reasons to support.**

Yes – they are just kids, they are missing school, they are working way too hard for their age and it’s too much on their bodies

No – they are just trying to help provide for their family, they still learn in the fields (labor skills and think of Francisco’s librito)

**Are children too young to work in the fields now-a-days? Why or why not? Give reasons to support.**

Yes – they should be in school, they are doing work that is way too hard for them (what about child labor laws?)

No – they are learning the value of hard work, they are learning the value of family, they feel fulfilled working

1. **How would it affect their lives and their family members’ lives if they were not allowed to work?**

There might not be as much food on the table, they might have to move even more, they might not be able to live in an actual building because the employer might say not enough people are working to live there for free

1. **Does Francisco deserve a cotton sack? Why or why not? What do you think he has to do to earn it?**

Yes – he tries so hard to help his family out, so why not give him one

No – he can’t handle the work that goes along with it

He probably has to prove to Papá that he can keep up despite the weather conditions and also be honest (instead of putting dirt clods in the cotton bols like he did earlier).

**Chapter 9: “The Circuit” (pages 61-69)**

1. **Based on this chapter and your own prior knowledge, what do you think the word *circuit* means? Write your answer below.**

Circuit breaker, circuit rider, circuitry (electrical stuff)

**Once you have predicted its meaning, look the word up in a dictionary. There will be several meanings. Which one do you think best fits and why? Write the definition and your explanation below.**

Definitions from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/circuit>

“3 a **:** a regular tour (as by a traveling judge or preacher) around an assigned district or territory

b **:** the route traveled”

**Why do you believe that the author chose to use this chapter’s name as the title for his book?**

The circuit (the route they travel or the area they travel around) is a constant thing for this family. It’s the migrant way of life. They are always moving/traveling.

1. **Constants (i.e. things that remain the same) are few and far between in Francisco’s life (besides moving all the time). However, this chapter does give a few objects (two in particular) that seem to stay with the family as they move. What are those objects and what do they symbolize?**

The Carcachita – it’s kind of like their house on wheels, since they’ve never really had a real home

Mamá’s olla (her pot for cooking) – it’s almost like their dinner table/kitchen

**Can you find any other constants in Francisco’s life in this chapter or others?**

The mattress – it’s about as close to a bed and a real room as you can get

1. **Oftentimes in schools today, classes that are not core subjects are eliminated due to budget cuts. How do you think non-core subjects such as music, art, woodshop, mechanics, etc. benefit English Language Learners (and students in general)?**

It gives them an outlet (both ELL’s and students who struggle in school). Usually hands-on activities are more universal – you don’t have to know how to speak the English language, you just have to know how to speak the language of the non-core subject. It gives ELL’s and kids who struggle in school a way to be successful.

1. **Analyze how Mr. Lema is different from the other teacher Francisco had. Please write at least a paragraph.**

Mr. Lema – takes time out to help Francisco, helps him learn English, gives him an outlet (music) where he can be successful, is kind, compassionate, etc., and would probably let Francisco speak Spanish if he needed to and seems like the type of teacher who would even learn Spanish to communicate with Francisco

**Chapter 10: “Learning the Game” (pages 70-79)**

1. **Francisco learns some very valuable life lessons in this chapter from the situations with Gabriel and Carlos. Pick a few aspects, and in a few paragraphs, describe what he learns. You may want to pick a few words that represent the values he learns in order to organize your thoughts.**

Dignity, decency, standing up for what you believe/your values, treating people with respect, loyalty to his friends/countrymen

1. **Can you think of any other individuals in history who were mistreated (like Gabriel) and why they were mistreated?**

Jews with Hitler because they weren’t the “superior” race, mentally ill because they were sick beyond their control and placed in institutions and dealt with that way instead of being treated with kindness, respect, and dignity as they should have been

**Chapter 11: “To Have and to Hold” (pages 80-93)**

1. **How is the history of the Mexican people preserved in Francisco’s family? In other words, how do the children learn about it? How did their parents learn about it?**

Through oral history – his father told him; his father’s mother told his father and Papá passed it on

**Do you think this manner of preservation works? Is it accurate? Why or why not?**

Yes, it does because the kids remember a story better than just reading it themselves.

No, it doesn’t because the history could get lost in translation and make it inaccurate.

1. **What does this chapter demonstrate about knowledge and education? Think of Francisco’s librito, his pennies, the fire, the gumball incident, etc.**

Knowledge/education are power. If you know it in your head, you can’t really lose it.

**Chapter 12: “Moving Still” (94-111)**

1. **How will a year-round job for Roberto change the family’s lives?**

They won’t have to keep moving all the time, they can have a steady income, the kids can stay in school throughout the entire school year

**Do you think that too much pressure is put on Roberto, as the oldest, since Papá is injured? Have you or someone you know ever had a great deal of responsibility expected of you? How did you or the individual handle it?**

Yes – he’s still just a teen, not a parent/adult

No – he can handle it, he’s already used to being a breadwinner for the family, to an extent

Yes/No – good/bad

1. **“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. – That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed…”**

**When the writers of the Declaration of Independence wrote the document, do you think they believed “all men” applied literally to all people?**

Yes – everyone everywhere should be given basic human rights and treated with decency

No – they were just talking about being equal with England

**Does the Declaration of Independence apply today? To whom does it apply? Citizens? Non-citizens? Both? Explain why.**

Yes, of course it does

No, it doesn’t

Everybody – everyone deserves freedom because everyone deserves the same basic human rights;

Citizens – because it was written for Americans

Non-citizens too – because they are people who deserve the same respect/decency as citizens

Both – because we were all created by God to be treated equally no matter what our race, color, ethnicity, occupation, socio-economic status

1. **Create a list of ideas to help Francisco and his family return to the United States.**

Get a sponsor (perhaps one of their former employers) to help them with funds to come back and apply for citizenship through legal means, prove themselves to the US by demonstrating that they are Americans now and contributors to society, go back to Mexico and apply for citizenship and work in Mexico while they wait, apply for work visas and enter the US that way and apply for citizenship when they get back to the US